

May 12-May 18, 2011

# Ailey Gala 2011: Nothing but pride!

By **CHARMAINE PATRICIA WARREN**

*Special to the AmNews*

Yes, absolutely, there was a great deal of pomp and circumstance (ball gowns, black ties, a red carpet and celebrities), because after all, it was time for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) annual spring gala at the world famous Apollo Theater to celebrate and support dance education under the Ailey umbrella. Hosted by honorary chair Courtney B. Vance and honoring Grudo Goldman, PhD, vice chairman of the board of trustees for AAADT, this event was presented to support the myriad scholarships for students of the Ailey School, Ailey Arts in Education programs and community programs, including AileyCamp in Washington Heights.

The evening opened with Judith Jamison, the theater's artistic director, honoring Goldman, who not only thanked the Ailey organization but remembered the late founding Ailey School director, Denise Jefferson, and the esteemed Dr. Katherine Dunham in his humble acceptance speech. Jamison then said, "Let's dance," and the evening of dance commenced with an excerpt, "Sally Forth," from former AAADT member Christopher Huggins' 2010 critically acclaimed work "Anointed."

In "Anointed," the five women of AAADT, Linda Celeste Sims, Ghrai DeVore, Rosalyn Deshauteurs, Demetia Hopkins and Constance Stamatou, rocked the house with their sultry purple dresses, as

Anton Zea Nadal, Miho Sawayanagi, Danielle Schlauderaff, Edward Spots and Sebastian West) followed with "Inspiration/Expiration" (2011), a mix of partnering, lifts and groupings by Scott Rink. Then, as

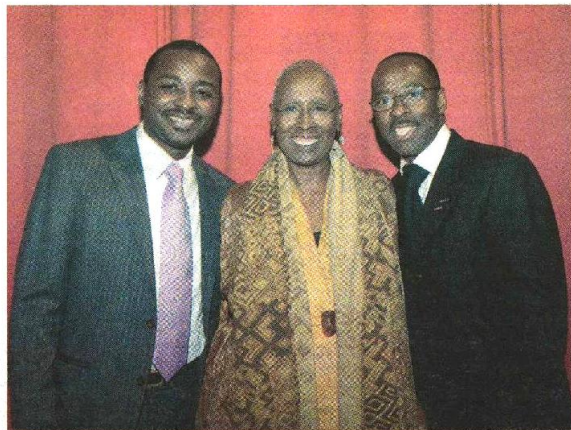
adagios and boldly challenging duets, the curtain closed before you knew it. More please.

Make no mistake, this "second company" has the chops to take on any choreographer's work and present it with passion.

Rachel McLaren, Ghrai DeVore and Briana Reed followed with a witty rendition of Camille A. Brown's "Evolution of a Secured Feminine" (2007).

Robert Battle, artistic director designee, opened the second half of the evening, with words about the richness of the past year's "pas de deux" with Jamison and how his role as co-pilot was à propos because, as the pilot, Jamison "knows how to fly."

Courtney B. Vance, "representing the family," followed with accolades for AAADT and introduced the film "Celebrating 'Revelations' at 50" by Judy Kinberg, which was followed by excerpts from Ailey's signature work, "Revelations" (1960), performed by very young and not so young students of the Ailey School, plus Ailey II and members of AAADT. Ailey's legacy was clear when Ailey II's Solomon Dumas danced "Wade in the Water" just as Ailey himself did in the film, and oh, how wonderful it was to see the



**Robert Battle, Judith Jamison and Courtney B. Vance**

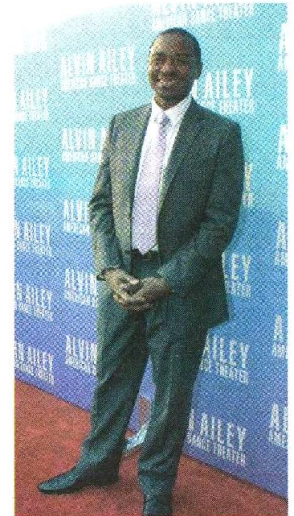
(Tari Bloom photo)

they crossed the stage with angular struts on the balls of their feet, tight-fisted or open-fingered contractions with arms held high above their heads or smoothly shifting from complicated ballet steps to equally intricate jazz steps. This was only an excerpt!

Students of the Ailey School (Samantha Barriento, Azza Bashir, Riccardo Battaglia, Celine D'Hont, Keenan Harris, Daphne Lee, Olivier Medus,

would be expected, the dancers of Ailey II (Solomon Dumas, Brittany Engel-Adams, Renaldo Gardner, Jacqueline Green, Collin Heyward, Yusaku Komori, Slim Melo, Major Nesby, Kelly Robotham, Fana Tesfagiorgis and Elizabeth Wasington) offered a stirring performance of Donald Byrd's timeless and technically challenging work "Shards" (1988).

Between the softness and the quick pacing, fast turns,



**Robert Battle, artistic director designee** (Bill Moore photo)

always elegant and talented Renee Robinson guide them. The audience rose to their feet for an encore!

Following the performance, the 900 guests, which included celebrities Lorraine Boyle, Lyor Cohen, Tory Burch, R & B singer Miguel, Blythe Danner, Linda Fargo, Naeem and Ranzana Khan, David E. Monn, Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, Debra Lee, Terry Lundgren, Henry McGee and Joan and Sandy Weill, danced the night away at the post-performance party to music by DJ Ruckus under the shining lights of the Studio 54 mirrorball.